

The Sovereign Grace Messenger

A Publication of the Sovereign Grace Baptist Fellowship

**“The Lord Hath Prepared His Throne In The Heavens;
And His Kingdom Ruleth Over All.”**

Issue 29

Psalm 103:19

Spring 2011

“The Pillar and Ground of the Truth”

Tom Henry

“These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” (II Timothy 3: 14, 15 KJV)

Paul here states his reason for writing this epistle. It was to instruct Timothy, to whom he had committed the oversight of the church at Ephesus, how he should conduct himself in the church of God. Some prefer a more general rendering of the text, giving it a broader application, which reads, “*that thou mayest know how men oughtest to behave themselves in the house of God.*” The text can bear such a translation, and surely none would argue that all members without exception should behave themselves appropriately in God’s house. Plus, many of the things written in the preceding portion of the epistle have respect to the conduct of men generally. However, the context strongly indicates that Paul is addressing these words to Timothy in particular. “*These things write I unto thee, hoping to come to thee...that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God.*” To maintain the *second person singular* throughout seems most logical. Timothy must discharge his office as minister, evangelist, and pastor with honor to God and himself, and to the profit of the people.

As we consider the apostle’s stated purpose for writing this first pastoral epistle, his instructions to Timothy are written most carefully, in the event that his intentions to come to Ephesus in person should not materialize, or should his coming be delayed. Paul had no way of knowing that his hope would not be

realized. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit did know, and moved His apostle to write these things down, not for Timothy only, but for us as well.

“When we come to appreciate the Church as she is here described by her highly elevated titles, we must then realize how that nothing of a merely carnal nature can by any means add to her greatness.”

As we consider this tremendous text of Scripture, let us all take heed to ourselves, that we always “*walk as children of light, proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.*” Let us *walk circumspectly* at all times, for we are, after all, God’s *sanctuary*. However, let those of us who have been called to the pastoral oversight of God’s

house give particular *heed to ourselves and to the doctrine, that we might both save ourselves, and them that hear us.*

In contemplating Paul’s statement of purpose: “*that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God,*” we need not ask for any reason or motive beyond that which is couched in the text itself. There are two most glorious descriptions of the Church set forth in the text which provides more than sufficient justification for his insistence upon unimpeachable pastoral conduct in the church. First, she is described in her **designation**: “*The house of God...the church of the living God.*” Secondly, she is described in her **destination**: “*The pillar and ground of the truth.*”

THE CHURCH’S DESIGNATION

First, the church is designated, “*the house of God.*” The apostle is being very specific when he says; “*the house of God, which is the Church of the living God.*” The relative, “*which*”, is in this case, stronger than ordinary. (Another example of this is Gal. 4: 24) It is “*employed to introduce an especial attribute belonging to the nature of an object, its real and peculiar property.*” (Jeff, Gr. Pp 816, 817) Thus, the text might read, “*the house of God, which is indeed the Church of the living God.*” The necessity for this strong emphasis was because in former times the



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expression “*house of God*” had been much associated with the material fabric of the temple, which was believed to be the habitation and dwelling-place of the Divine Majesty. (II Chron. 5: 14; Isa. 56:7; Matt. 21: 13) There was nothing of like sort in the Gospel dispensation, for God’s people are *indeed* God’s house. But, in truth, this was nothing new. Even in Old Testament times the more enlightened believers understood that, “*the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands.*” The temple, with its sacred furnishings and services, was only an emblem of God’s fellowship with His people. The only proper habitation of God on the earth had ever been His people themselves. (Isa. 66:2) There was a mutual dwelling – they in God, and God in them. (Psa. 90: 1; Ezek. 11:16)

Having the spiritual nature of the church so clearly revealed, it should no longer be necessary, though sadly it is, to say that God’s house is not a building of bricks and mortar. The apostle most emphatically declares that the house of God is indeed His church. Although the church is, in fact, called a building, it is a spiritual building, whose stones are living stones. (I Peter 2: 15) The living stones in this building are of both Jews and Gentiles. (Eph. 2: 14ff). Its mortar, if you will, is *that which every joint supplieth.* (Eph. 4: 16)

Even though both Jews and Gentiles are together referred to as “*the household of God,*” (Eph. 2: 19) the KJV here is correct, in my opinion, in rendering *oikoi*, *house*, and not *household*, as in the preceding verse. (Vs. 4, 5, 12) Paul is not here emphasizing the fact of the church as the

family of God, but rather, as His dwelling-place. Believers are God’s dwelling-place. “*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*” (I Cor. 3: 16) “*For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them.*” (II Cor. 6: 16) With reference to Christ as a Son in His own house, the writer adds, “*Whose house we are, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.*” (Heb. 3:6)

Seeing that the church is God’s house, temple, habitation or dwelling-place, surely it is good that we know how to properly conduct ourselves therein. Let us also know that “*judgment must begin at the house of God.*” (I Peter 4: 17)

Second, the Church is most gloriously designated “*the church (ecclesia) of the living God.*” Of all institutions, the church alone has been so highly honored as to have been given a title so excellent. In this designation can be seen both her holy character and her loving favor with God. It expresses the special and effectual calling of the elect into living union with the living God.

The Church of God, the *ecclesia*, in its full sense is a company of persons called out by the Holy Spirit from among the rest of mankind, banded together for the purpose of the defense and the propagation of the truth. As Patrick Fairbairn puts it, “It is the Church as the *ecclesia* of God, His elect, whom He has called out of the world and gathered into His fold that He may sustain and keep them unto life eternal.”

But here, as in many other places, the apostle uses the word *ecclesia*, not in its absolute sense, but as referring to the outstanding, visible organized communities of believers established in this or that locality. As Mr. Spurgeon noted, “If there be but three or four, yet if they be so banded together in the fear of God, they are to all intent and purpose, a church; and if they should happen to number thousands, they are no more a church because of their numbers – a church being a company of faithful men.”

The excellence of this glorious title is the more enhanced by the phrase “*the living God.*” We have no dead formal religion, if we be indeed the church of the living God. There are churches of God, and there are synagogues of Satan. There are churches that take the name upon themselves, but

they are dead. (Rev. 3:1) But, as God lives, so do His churches live.

The Church’s God is the *living* God. Timothy knew all too well what vain hopeless religion the Ephesians all about him were practicing. They would fall down before some lifeless image, whether it be the image of Diana, or some other block or stone. Our God, the God of the Church lives and reigns. He shows His life and power all around us. We see Him sustaining nature, ruling providence, and reigning in the midst of the Church. He is the living God. By the living Spirit of God, we preach the living Christ. He ever lives to make intercession for us as we preach the living Gospel, by which He calls his elect out of death into His life, and brings them into living union with Himself, making them His Church.

When we come to appreciate the Church as she is here described by her highly elevated titles, we must then realize how that nothing of a merely carnal nature can by any means add to her greatness. Should she have the fullest and friendliest support and cooperation of all worldly powers, her real glory could not thereby be improved in the least degree.

Thus, we have a glorious description of the church in her designation as God’s own called out assembly, which He has made His dwelling place. John Newton beautifully sets forth this precious truth in the words of his great hymn, the title of which is doubtless taken from Psalm 87: 3:

“Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion City of our God; He whose word cannot be broken formed thee for His own abode.”

THE CHURCH’S DESTINATION

The church is described in her **destination**, i.e. her appointed or predetermined purpose. She is “*the pillar and ground of the truth.*” The church is established to **maintain** and **exhibit** before the world the testimony of Divine truth that is committed to her keeping. This is what she is called to do. This is a perfectly fitting and natural calling for Christ’s Church. Was not He Himself called to bear witness to the truth, and in doing so, to become the light of the world? In this, Christ is pre-eminently what in a measure His Church is to be. The Church is a foundation upon which truth may securely rest amid all of the

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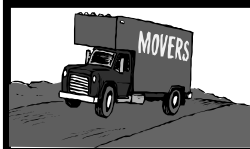
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uncertainties of the world. It is also a pillar to bear it aloft, that all may know and consider it.

This mode of interpretation has been resisted in certain quarters because of the supposition that it plays too much to the Church of Rome. Some expositions have gone so far as to connect these words with what follows, (Vs. 16) rather than what precedes them. This forms a most artificial and awkward beginning of a new sentence. Plus the connection is not at all suitable. This is, indeed, one of the passages that Rome uses to base its claim to universal homage as the one Church of Christ. But, it is no more suitable to Rome's purpose than any other text that she, by arbitrary distinction and vain assumption, has used to promote her false claim. It is not for us to give either a *Protestant* or *Catholic* sense to the Scripture. It is our duty to give the true sense, be that what it may. The rendering of our version (KJV) is, as far as can be determined, quite accurate and clear. Paul describes the church in reference to truth as a *pillar*, and the *base* upon which that pillar is supported.

Perhaps this analogy came to Paul's mind because of the great temple of Diana that was at Ephesus. That massive structure was adorned with more than a hundred enormous pillars made of Persian marble some sixty feet in height. Each was set upon a basement which was elevated ten steps above the surrounding area. False religions always seek to dazzle their worshippers with magnificent material structures meant to represent the greatness of their god and their religion. True religion and undefiled is always concerned, not with outward appearances, but inward strength and beauty. Paul calls the church of God the pillar and basement of the truth. It is not a gigantic building with stupendous columns. It is a spiritual house made up of living stones, and is itself a pillar, and also the foundation which holds up the pillar.

Now, in a certain sense the church cannot be the pillar and ground of the truth, because truth is true of itself, and owes its origin to God Himself. The church is not the deepest foundation of truth, because the church, which is the ground of truth, itself rests upon the Rock of Ages. Jesus Christ is the chief corner stone of the church. (Eph. 2:20) But, truth itself is one thing, while truth as existing in the world is another. It is the church of God which is to believe, vindicate, proclaim and defend the

truth in this world. The church is all the people of God; *"them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ."* (I Cor. 1:2) The *person* who, therefore, will take up the cause of truth, stand for it, fight for it, and make it known, may be properly called the pillar and basement of the truth in this world.

“The church is to adorn the doctrine of God her Savior in all things. Thus, she is a pillar, not only of enduring strength, but of wondrous beauty.”

The Church being the pillar and ground of truth means that the precious doctrines of the faith are under the guardianship of the church, and in her they must ever abide and be maintained. Truth is not preserved by any of its orthodox articles and creeds, good as they may be, nor by its ministers. Neither is this sacred trust to be sublet to any of its outreach ministries. All who go out to preach must be examined, set apart, sent out and overseen by the church, to which they must ever be accountable. Clearly, it is the church as she is represented in visible organized local assemblies, which must assume this sacred duty.

This means that in the true church the truth is uplifted as upon a pillar. Truth, like a pillar, is founded upon an unshakable, unmovable basement so that it might stand upright and be seen. It is the duty and privilege of the Church of Jesus Christ to

exalt the truth into the open view of all mankind. The Church is a pillar which lifts up and publishes all of the great truths of His Gospel; all of the great articles of the *Mystery of Godliness*. (Vs. 16) We must not hide this Gospel under a bushel, but hold it up high for all the world to see.

The Church, as a pillar, is intended to lift up the truth in its *wondrous beauty*. That beautiful temple which Solomon built was a type of the church. As one would approach unto it, that which would first capture his gaze would be the two massive pillars of brass standing tall in the forefront. Although these pillars, the one named Jachin, and the other Boaz, symbolized *establishment* and *strength* respectively, as indicated by their names, they were also things of great beauty. Solomon hired a cunning worker of brass to beautify them with amazing ornate work. They were then topped with magnificent chapters. They were truly pillars of rare beauty. (See I Kings 7: 13-22) God's truth is indeed powerful, and it is established forever, of this we are sure, but God's truth is also to be **admired**. The church is to adorn the doctrine of God her Savior in all things. Thus, she is a pillar, not only of enduring strength, but of wondrous beauty.

The Church, like a great pillar fixed upon a solid base, will stand fast and endure against all enemies of truth. Jesus said, *"The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* The Greek Parthenon built on the hill of the Acropolis in the fourth century BC represents the summit of classical Greek architecture. Having stood there for over 20 centuries, it was blown up by the Turks in 1687. Even still, many of its columns remain standing to this day. Nevertheless, when those great columns are all reduced to dust, the Church as the pillar and ground of the truth will be standing firm as ever. Peter said, *"The word of the Lord endureth forever and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you."* (I Pet. 1: 25) Jesus said, *"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."* (Mark 13: 31)

We know that the Church, the *ecclesia*, is a company of faithful men called out by God from the world. But, in a doctrinal and practical sense, a true church must be patterned after the Church of the Apostles. She finds not her model in any of the institutions that have been revised after the opinions and fancies of men. In fact, she

stands as a *brazen pillar* against all revisions and alterations of Divine truth, knowing that, *"If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any shall take away from the words of the book of this prophesy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."* (Rev. 22: 18, 19) This pillar is firmly fixed upon a solid base so as not to be moved or shaken by any winds of doctrine that are contrary to the teachings of Christ. So must the true Church be in all ages, yielding to no error, nor concealment of doctrine, nor change of ordinance.

The Church of God is to uphold, defend, maintain and propagate the pure doctrine of Christ and His apostles. If she fails in this, if in her midst the truth is not loved, if it is not adorned, if it is not vindicated and proclaimed, the church, so-called, is no longer the pillar and ground of the truth.

How careful, therefore, ought Timothy to be in the discharge of his pastoral duties! How careful also should every member of the church be to maintain a proper character! How careful, especially to stand in the truth, which alone defines the church in its purpose here.

Oh, what a blessing is ours to be numbered among His chosen ones, called out from the world, and made a part of the Church of the Living God, which is the *house* of God where He is pleased to dwell! What an honor it is to be entrusted with the everlasting Gospel, as the pillar and ground of the truth! May God's truth be to us more precious than life itself. May we prove ourselves worthy of this sacred trust by *holding fast the form of sound words*, whatever the cost. *"That good thing which was committed to us,"* may we *"keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us."* (II Tim. 1: 13, 14)

THE UNCREATED SON

Charles D. Alexander

"Christ is the image of the invisible God," says Paul (Colossians 1:15). This means that without Christ the Father is without His own likeness. There is no means by which the Father can scrutinize His own being but in Christ. Therefore, we believe in the eternal Sonship of Christ--that is, the Only Begotten Son was not begotten in any process of time, but was eternally there with the Father. He was never born, never began, and was never created. He has His being in an act of eternal generation from the Father. He always was with the Father, just as our own image is always with us to be seen whenever there is a mirror to reflect it. Christ always was *"coming forth"* from the bosom of the Father. He was and is the living mirror in which God sees Himself--and loves what He sees.

It does not mean that the Son is merely a *"likeness"* of the invisible God. *"Image"* here means that God beholds Himself in the Son. There are three Persons but one God. The Father, who is God sees Himself in the Son, who is God--not another God, but the God which the Father is and the same God which the Holy Spirit is--one divine essence which is the Godhead existing co-eternally and co-equally in Three Persons without dividing the substance or confusing the Persons.

Paul understood this--that the Son makes that visible which the Father is, and it is through the Son alone that the Father can be seen and understood. And we too understand, because Christ has made the Father intimately nigh and displayed all that the Father is in love, mercy, truth, and holiness. And by grace we are going to understand more. As Christ is the image of God, so He also became our image--not the image of our fallen and sinful state, but as the Creator intended man should be. He assumed our nature and our flesh and through Him, born again of His Spirit, in His likeness, we are one with Him and with the Father (John 17:21-23).

Christ is *"the firstborn of every creature"* (Colossians 1:15). That is, He is the head and heir of creation. "Firstborn" does not mean that Christ was ever "born" as to His divine nature, but that He has the exclusive title to possess all the works of God as one to whom the exclusive inheritance belongs--He is the only begotten Son of the Father, and there is not another to challenge His title to inherit all things. Christ inherits all that the Father is--His name, glory,

wealth, honor, power, dominion. All the plenitude of the divine Being belongs to Christ as the birthright of the Only-Begotten. He is not a creature, but He inherits all creation.

"By Him were all things created" (Colossians 1:16). This does not contradict the first verse of the Bible which declares, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,"* for Christ is one God with the Father and the Holy Ghost. How did God create the world? By wisdom and power. But Christ is the wisdom and power of God (1 Corinthians 1:24). God's wisdom and power are personified in Christ, the eternal LOGOS (WORD). Creative power was not a mere energetic motion of omnipotence. When God said, *"Let there be light,"* Christ was that Word which God spoke in authority and power. Christ is the eternal wisdom by which God designed and planned all things. Christ is the Architect of the ages, and in Him all history is summed up and given its form and meaning and purpose. (Proverbs 8: 22-31)

Not only visible things were created by Him, but the invisible also *"whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers"* (Colossians 1:16). These *"invisible things"* are the angelic powers who are the agents and ministers of the divine providence, whose activity lies behind the events of earth and brings to pass the great events of history (see the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation).

As the visible thrones and powers on earth are raised up or suppressed by God at His pleasure, so the unseen powers of the angelic world are ordered by Him so that Satan himself is the unwilling slave of providence to bring to pass whatsoever Christ pleases to be done.

Editor's note: Thanks to the efforts of Elder Jim Gunn of Vineland Park Baptist Church of Hueytown, Alabama, the writings and audio sermons of Charles D. Alexander are available on the internet.

www.vinelandparkbaptist.org

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THE CHURCH: AUTHORITY BY WHICH THE CHURCH IS TO BE GOVERNED

Terry Wolever

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Love to Christ will be manifested in loving what He loves. The title of a book I recently purchased may best sum up this sentiment in a few words, “Christ Loves the Church and So Should You.” Love for Christ and for His church will lead us to desire to know His mind on how we ought to govern and be governed in His house (1 Tim. 3: 15).

always reside with the individuals in whom the authority is vested. Abuse can take place in either model. Most all of us I’m sure have known of *pastors* who shouldn’t have been, as well as *elders* who shouldn’t have been. The real issue revolves around this—can we trust the man or men who are set over us to lead us in “*the doctrine which is according to godliness*” (1 Tim. 6: 3)? If we can, and do, should we not “*esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake*” (1Thess. 5: 13) ?

Having laid aside that which may be trendy or novel among men, the question for us as earnest Christians then is, “*what saith the scripture*” (Rom. 4: 3; Gal. 4: 30) as to which form of practical church authority is truly biblical—the single elder/pastor (or co-pastors), congregational rule model or the plurality of elders, elder-rule model? For it is these models that we as evangelical Christians most generally find ourselves concerned with. Advocates of either might be surprised (but hopefully not chagrined) when I would contend that *both* are biblical. Yes, the truth is that the one is neither superior to the other, nor to be advocated with disdain for the other. The New Testament, as well as our own denominational history, provides ample evidence that each has a rightful place in our church polity. Good men of scriptural integrity have utilized both. And under both models we have had (and may have even witnessed) outstanding leaders, genuine revival, and the salvation of souls. If we truly respect the independence of the local church, while at the same time recognizing the vital necessity of an interdependence and spirit of cooperation among churches of like faith and order, we will accept the fact that the churches we interact with may differ in their church government and therefore shouldn’t seek to ‘shame’ another into doing things the way we may think best. If we are *asked* what we think is best, then that is an altogether different matter. One of the greatest hindrances to our spirit of unity among the brethren is our tendency to look askance at one another for holding differing views on church authority.

The success, if I may use the word, of either elder rule or congregational rule will

When we think of whose authority we are under in the local visible body, do we truly comprehend that Christ Jesus is “*the head over all things to the church, which is His body*”(Eph.1: 22-23)? If you do understand and embrace this as a first principle, surely you will seek to do all, as one of our early ministers in this country put it, “according to the express direction of God’s word, remembering you are the servant, not the law-giver, and have no authority to mutilate, change, or dispense with the injunctions of God your Saviour.”¹

Though having no authority to do so, there are those who are calling upon us today to leave our churches because of an erroneous assumption that they are all apostate and God is not to be found in the institutional church. Some would also decry the “*patternism*” found within our churches. Must we, they would seem to say to us, do “*all things according to the pattern God showed to thee in the mount*” (Hebrews 8: 5)? We must if we would be “*divinely instructed*,” as Moses was. One of the complaints the Lord had with Israel under the Old Covenant was that they sought not His counsel, especially on matters of great consequence. Is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ a matter of great consequence? If we are agreed that it is, the choice is really a simple one—follow the dictates of an endless array of ever-changing opinions from fallen sinners just like ourselves, or the infinite wisdom and counsel of the Most High God. The same God, I might add, who has called us from darkness into His marvelous light.

¹Stephen Gano (1762-1828), in a charge given at an ordination service.

“The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is at one and the same time not one of our own making and yet one of our own making.”

One often voiced criticism of congregational rule in our day is that the average person in the pew is too worldly or not spiritually-minded enough to govern the affairs of the church. This to me would speak more to a failure of leadership and teaching from the pulpit, than to a problem in the pew. Where there is a lack of loving and corrective church discipline and the inculcating of spirituality among the membership by teaching *and* example, how can one expect people to excel pastor?

We have all heard the stories about ‘absentee’ or ‘inactive’ members showing up to vote on important matters in the church and swaying the vote negatively. Yet might we not ask, why are there such ‘absentee’ or ‘inactive’ members? Are *these* of New Testament faith and order? Would not a more biblical stance on church discipline take care to see that no such persons clutter the rolls (and voting) of our churches? Again, it is not the model of congregational rule which is at fault, but a failure in other areas of church polity: membership qualifications, upholding of covenant obligations, and other basic discipline.

Each body of believers and every believer must remember that they are accountable to Christ, the Head of the church, both collectively and individually. Collectively as a congregation, we can experience either the commendation of the Lord by His obvious blessing on our endeavors for His glory or run the risk of having our lamp stand removed. And we know as individuals that we all must give an account of our stewardship and faithfulness to our local body. Paul’s admonition to young Timothy, as one in position of authority, was that he might be “*an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity*” (1 Tim. 4: 12). While each of us

has undoubtedly failed in these six areas at some time or other, yet that shouldn’t deter us from striving to attain these ideal Christian virtues. In this regard it might be of help to honestly inquire of ourselves, both as pastor/elders and as members, “What kind of church would my church be, if everyone in my church was just like me?” Are you an example of faithfulness to others in the church, especially to our young people in the rising generation, or indifferent as to whether you are or not?

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is at one and the same time not one of our own making and yet one of our own making. It is not of our own making for it is a conception of Heaven. Its institution, officers and ordinances are of divine origin. But its being what it can and should be has been entrusted to a very great degree by the Lord in us. To the degree that we yield ourselves to His authority over His church collectively and individually will manifest the degree to which we magnify the grace of God and give glory to His name. We should honor those to whom honor is due as the officers of His church. A favorite author, William R. Williams (1804-1885), in his own skillful way, has so well stated that “God has all varieties of gifts in these His ministers. There are some whose minds are formed for patient inquiry, and others for

impressive statement and irresistible appeal. One man shows his strength in his prayers, and another in his sermons, and yet another in his pastoral visits...and the attempt, sometimes apparent, to make any individual teacher the standard, to whose personal endowments every other must be conformed, or suffer rejection, is an attempt to mend God’s better methods of using all and all varieties of gifts in His school. Peter could neither speak, write, nor act like John; and John was incapable of assuming the tone and port of Peter; and neither could dilate, with the broad magnificence, or dive into the deep mysteries of truth, with the unfathomed profundity of Paul: yet Paul, and Peter, and John were all servants of the same Christ, organs and channels of the same Holy Spirit, and efficient servants of the same Church of the Living God...the divine and the human, the visible and the invisible, combine as the appointed teachers of the Church as it is God’s school: the mortal usher seen, but the Great Master by whom and for whom he works, unseen.”

If those in authority over us in Christ’s church help us to more clearly see and know this unseen but Great Master, can we expect anything better this side of glory?

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Burning a House to Kill Mice¹

“If a man should fire a house to destroy the mice in it, we should think him to be fairly mad.”

Yet those who consider themselves to be reasonable men will set a church in a blaze about the merest trifle. Meeting after meeting will be called, and angry discussions provoked, and holy work overturned about the smallest mistake of the preacher, or the minutest fault of a deacon. One would think that heaven itself was endangered, and yet it turns out to be a question of infinitesimal importance. Societies which were doing great service have even been broken up by the crazy whimsies of good brethren, who made much ado about nothing, and did great harm in trying to do a little good.

But the mice are a nuisance! Of course they are, and we must buy a cat or set a trap, but we certainly shall not burn the house down when a simple means will accomplish our purpose. We aim at reformation, not all desolation. We see no wisdom in so perpetually improving a church or a good society that in the end it is improved from the face of the earth. Religion has been brought to the sick, and fools have doctored it till they brought it to death’s door by their poisons. Prudence is to be used, even when our object is worthiest of zeal; and never ought we to endanger a really good thing for the sake of making it a little better.

Lord, make me wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove, and if I am called to protest against error or sin, help me to do it in the spirit of my Lord.



¹Charles H. Spurgeon commenting on a quote from Thomas Manton. Taken from *FLOWERS FROM A PURITAN’S GARDEN*, SPRINKLE PUBLICATIONS, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

The Nature and Marks of a True Church

Jon Cardwell



Jon Cardwell is pastor of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church of Anniston, Alabama and serves as the current Vice-Chairman of the Sovereign Grace Baptist Fellowship.

When we speak of the marks of a true Church we are speaking of the outward characteristics that identify a local congregation as a biblical Church; that is, by *what* it does. These marks will also be accompanied by the means that produce these marks; that is, by *how* it achieves what it does. When we speak of the nature of the true Church we are speaking of an inward reality that provides the motivation to accomplish the *what*, as well as the support to justify the *how* in accomplishing those marks. This may be referred to as the *why* of a congregation's marks and means. Said another way, a Church's characteristics are defined and evidenced by its mission and methods (marks and means), while its character is defined by its true nature providing the motivation to carry out its mission through the methods it employs.

The main thrust of this article is to answer the *why*, or the *motivation*, of Christ's Church, while touching first upon the *marks* of a true, biblical Church, as well as touching briefly on the *means*.

CAVEAT, FIRST: We must understand from the beginning that this article may not expound thoroughly upon many facets of the Church; facets and aspects that some may believe should have been included or more fully developed—and they may be correct; nevertheless, I believe that we will be given quite a bit to ponder with just the areas we will examine. Therefore, although

the formation of the Church, its functions, its leadership, its government, its ordinances, and so forth, are quite important indeed, those aspects of the Church themselves will only be mentioned as it applies to our topic at hand.

CAVEAT, SECOND: Although I certainly believe in the universal, invisible Church that is comprised of all those redeemed by God's grace and gathered as one people under Christ Jesus as the Head of His Church from the beginning until He returns, for the most part, when the "Church" is mentioned here, we are studying her as the local, visible Church. Though we all may have varying and differing views between the *Church* and *church*, or between the *Church* and *Israel*, or between the *Church* and *the kingdom*, or whatever the distinction may be, if we read this article as pertaining to our own situations as local, visible gatherings of those called out and assembled in the name of Christ our risen Savior, we may, by God's grace, fare far better.

The Marks of a True Church

Rather than a Church comprised of saints "*that have turned the world upside down*" with the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 17:6), much of what is called "Christianity" in America may be defined with words such as apathy and avarice, bedlam and betrayal, compromise and complacency, and we could probably go on with d through z. Instead of turning the world upside down by the preaching of the gospel, local gatherings of "believers" have given Christ's betrothed bride away in a marriage with the ungodly world through an elaborate and very public wedding celebration performed and pronounced by Reverend Hume A. Nist in Vanity Fair, witnessed by one Mr. Worldly Wiseman, approved by the very active religionist, Mr. Talkative, and sealed and sanctioned from a license issued by Judge Noah Count.

Yet, the Lord Jesus promised that "*the gates of hell shall not prevail against*" His Church (Matt 16:18), neither would He

leave His people nor forsake them (Heb 13:5; Matt 28:20; Gen 28:15). "*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever*" (Heb 13:8), as Author and Finisher of faith, has begun a good work in His saints and will bring it to completion in that Day (Heb 12:2; Phil 1:6). His disciples are not stranded as orphans (Jn 14:18). He has preserved His holy Word and has given it to His Church for its sanctification through the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit (Matt 24:35; Jn 17:17; 14:26; 16:13). We can surely trust the truth of His Word. So, what does the Bible say about the marks of a true Church?

9 Marks. Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church, wrote a book titled *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*.¹ In his book he presented nine tangible traits from the scriptures that identify a congregation as one having the evidence of a Church that is obedient to her Savior's commands, loyal to His kingdom, and passionate for His communion. Perhaps not all will agree with these nine marks; or perhaps some might combine two or more to make one category (that is certainly reasonable); or perhaps some may place these in a different order, prioritizing one trait over another. No problem. Whatever our particulars, I think we might all agree that each of these elements should be manifested in a local Church to one degree or another; or at least it should be moving in the direction of fulfilling those features and functions.² These marks are listed by Dr. Dever's ministry as follows: Preaching, Theology, Gospel, Conversions, Evangelism, Membership, Discipline, Discipleship, Leadership.

Preaching. EXPOSITORY PREACHING from the pulpit is the first mark of a healthy Church. Dever defines expository preaching as a "sermon [that] takes the main point of a passage of Scripture, makes it the main point of the sermon, and applies it to life today." It may take on a form of chapter-by-chapter and verse-by-

¹Crossway © 2000, 2004

²I am only providing a very fast and loose treatment of Dr. Dever's "9 Marks" because, although the majority of this article contains the information on the marks of a true Church, the great emphasis on this article is the nature of Christ's Church, not the marks.

verse exposition; however, in sermons like those from Edwards, Whitefield, M'Cheyne or Spurgeon, it may be from a different text from week to week, yet no less expository, no less contextual, and no less applicable for the saint who has an ear to hear. Neh 8:8; Rom 10:9-17; 1 Cor 1:21; Heb 4:12; 1 Pet 1:23

Theology. The next mark of a healthy Church is **BIBLICAL THEOLOGY**. Biblical Theology is simply sound doctrine, or solid, consistent biblical interpretation. A failure in faithfulness to sound doctrine will adversely affect several other character traits listed among these nine marks. 1 Tim 4:6; 6:3; Tit 1:9; 2:10; 2 Jn 1:9

Gospel. A healthy Church is also distinguished as a **GOSPEL Church**, having a clear biblical understanding of what the gospel is, and knowing the gospel's power and preeminence, the gospel is given a very high priority and a very central emphasis in every ministry of the Church. Gen 3:15; Isa 52:13-53:12; Acts 2:14-40; Rom 3:21-28; 1 Cor 2:2; 15:1-4

Conversion. Healthy Churches recognize and understand the *sovereignty of God in salvation*, as well as *man's accountability* unto God as his Creator, *culpability* before God as his Judge, and *responsibility* to God as his only Redeemer. **BIBLICAL CONVERSION** of a soul is more than a mere acknowledgement of a fact or truth. It is the supernatural reality of the work of God. Ezek 36:22, 26-27; Mk 1:15; Jn 3:1-8; Acts 2:38; Rom 6:1-23; Eph 2:1-10

Evangelism. A healthy Church is also characterized by its active advancement of the kingdom of God through the **PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST** to a lost and dying world. Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Rom 10:9-17; 1 Pet 3:15-16

Membership. **BIBLICAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP** is not merely names on a Church role; it is the vibrant submission of believing saints to gather as often as possible in order to love, serve, and submit to one another in Christ for God's glory alone. Matt 16:16-19; Jn 13:34, 35; 1 Cor 5:12-13; Eph 5:20; Heb 10:24, 25

Discipline. A true Church has and practices **DISCIPLINE**. Biblical discipline is carried out in two main aspects for God's purpose of making a peculiar people unto Himself.

God says, "*Be ye holy; for I am holy*" (1 Pet 1:16); therefore, the true Church views every aspect of Christianity as an opportunity to develop spiritual habits: worship, prayer, preaching the gospel; teaching God's Word; family devotional worship, personal meditations upon the scriptures, fellowship with likeminded believers, etc. The second aspect of true Church discipline is found in the correction of sin among individuals within the local congregation. Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:1-23; Eph 4:11-32; 1 Pet 1:16

“Orderly discipline by submission to the Lord Jesus as Head of His Church is the core means from which all other means flow.”

Discipleship. A true Church is characterized by **BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP** in and among its members. We are exhorted in the scriptures to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). A true Church does not live by the philosophy, “Do as I say, not as I do.” Instruction in the Word for personal growth, coupled with edification and encouragement through the testimony and example of the assembly's members, is an identifying feature of a true Church. 1 Cor 11:1; Eph 4:1, 15; Phil 4:9; Heb 10:24-25; 13:7

Leadership. A true Church is also identified by **STRONG LEADERS**. The strength and maturity of its leaders not only oversees the edification and education of the Church, but are themselves good and faithful stewards, seeking and identifying

future leaders. Strong leadership desires strong leaders for the generations to follow, if the Lord should tarry. Jn 21:15-17; 1 Tim 3:1-7; 2 Tim 2:2; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet 5:1-3

The Means of Producing the Marks

A typical elemental theology will often present two descriptive alliterations drawn from the scriptures concerning the Lord's Church: *organism* and *organization*. As an organism, the New Testament Church is several times referred to as “the body of Christ,” with Jesus Christ as its Head (Col 1:18). The body of Christ is made up of many members with a distinct relationship one with another (Rom 12:5), submissive to its Head, Jesus Christ the Righteous King.

The other descriptor for the Church is that of an *organization*. This is easily recognized through the Lord Jesus' teaching on the subject of His Church when He spoke of the necessity for correction among the redeemed through disputes, misunderstandings and correction upon sin; and in cases of unrepentant sin, casting those out of the fellowship of believers (Matt 18:15-19). Paul applied the latter to a very disconcerting case of sin in Corinth for the desired purpose of seeing the sinner restored through genuine repentance after being separated from the fellowship and being delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Cor 5:1-13; 2 Cor 2:5-8).

From the beginning of New Testament history expressed in the Acts of the Apostles, deacons were recognized and installed for order and discipline quite early as the church grew (Acts 6:1-6). Disorder in the local Churches was addressed as quickly as possible, as was the case with Corinth, even as it pertained to spiritual gifts and the public worship of God: “*Let all things be done decently and in order*” (1 Cor 14:40).

Orderly discipline by submission to the Lord Jesus as Head of His Church is the core means from which all other means flow. In this way, the Church's conduct may be established and manifested; and this more specifically, by the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit according to scripture for the glory of Christ (Jn 14:26; 16:13, 14).

The means set forth in God's Word are necessary for the manifestation of those

continued next page

marks stated previously; else we are given over to nothing more than legalism or pragmatism. This is evident by the lives of the religious leaders of Christ's time, as their pious works were manifested for all to see, yet, the Lord's indictment of their means and motivations caused even the best of their works to be as an unclean thing: *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves"* (Matt 23:15). *Evangelism* is certainly a mark of a true Church, yet, the Lord's rebuke clearly states that there was nothing of God and nothing of Christ in their works.

A departure of the means to produce the marks of a true Church is increasingly evident in America despite great awakenings of revival in the past. Are local Churches growing in number? Certainly, but at what cost? Are they growing at the expense of *expository preaching*? Are more people entering the assembly due to a compromise in *conversion*? Is another *gospel* proclaimed, one that lacks power and scriptural basis? Are many running dangerously close to offering strange fire before the LORD, or succumbing altogether as did Nadab and Abihu of old? (Lev 10:1-11).

Because the scriptures declare that a heavenly goal may only be accomplished by heavenly means, we recognize that a compromise of the means results in a corruption of the goal. With every good intention we may overreact to the prevailing winds of pragmatism today only to dwell dangerously close to legalism. Christ indicts the scribes and Pharisees for meticulous observance of the law while forsaking the more important matters of the law: judgment, mercy and faith (Matt 23:23).

Efforts in maintaining the means in order to attain the marks will only cause us to stagger back and forth between the two undesirable states: legalism and pragmatism. Sadly, deception from self and the enemy, which presses against the weakness of flesh it its total depravity will result in a pseudo-faith condemned by Christ as the work of iniquity (Matt 7:21-23). What must be done? We must nurture an understanding of, an appreciation for,

and a submission to our nature as Christ's Church so that we may be truly free.

The Nature of a True Church

The Church at Ephesus was one noted for their impeccable doctrine and they manifested every good work, yet, they were charged for their motivation; they were rebuked for having left their first love, Jesus Christ (Rev 2:4). The chief and primary nature of a true Church is to love Christ Jesus chiefly and primarily (Matt 10:37-38; Lk 14:26-27). This love does not originate in us, but in God: *"We love him, because he first loved us"* (1 Jn 4:19).

When questioned about the great commandment of the law, the Lord Jesus summarized the whole of the Bible in this way: *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets"* (Matt 22:37-41). Given this, we might define the love that is the chief and primary nature of a true Church, yes, and also of true Christianity, as the holy submission of the heart, soul, mind and strength given to the utter devotion of God in, through, and by Christ Jesus.

The second commandment cited in the Lord's answer provides evidence that this love is taking place. Loving one's neighbor cannot certainly stand alone as the only evidence, for just as there are false professors of true Christian religion (Matt 7:21-23; 1 Jn 2:19), there are humanitarians and philanthropists given over to the benefit of mankind with nothing of Christ in their way or in their work. On the night He was betrayed, the Lord gave a new commandment to His disciples that was really a more defining mark of the New Testament reality: *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another"* (Jn 13:34). Further, Christ said that this love would be evident to the world: *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another"* (Jn 13:35).

Every good work manifested in a local

congregation's mission, even done in the name of Christ, and carried out dutifully as found in Ephesians chapters four through six, if it is not immersed in the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (Eph 3:19), then none of the great doctrinal truths of Ephesians chapters one through three will matter a whit or whistle. Paul expresses this more clearly to the Church at Corinth: *"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing"* (1 Cor 13:1-3).

The nature of the Church, filled, enabled, empowered, and sent forth in the love of Christ, must be the reason, strength and justification for every mark exhibited by a true and living Church.

Wrestling with Realities

We must recognize that the Lord Jesus Christ *is* building His Church, to put it in the reference to our time confinement. The perfection of Christ's Church is *in HIM* until He return in the restitution of all things. Until then, we persevere by God's grace, and extend grace and mercy as grace and mercy have been lavished upon us from above. When we love, we love with patience for *"charity suffereth long and is kind"* (1 Cor 13:4). That scripture implies the reality of a sanctifying work in progress because of love's manifest patience and kindness.

The most distinguishing mark of a true Church is the blessed presence of the Lord Jesus Christ walking in the midst of His candlesticks; and that is most predominantly manifested in the harmony of all three areas: marks, means, and motivation.

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (1 Jn 4:7).

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The Sovereign Grace Baptist Fellowship Annual Meeting is to be held at the Sovereign Grace Baptist Church of Anniston, Alabama this year. The date is Tuesday, September 13, 2011. Information regarding the meeting is found on page 24 of this publication. We hope to see you there. If you are not a member of the SGBF, we would delight to have you visit with us.

Editorial: Stay the Course!

Ron Staley

Admiral William F. (Bull) Halsey, Jr. was given the daunting task of commanding the combined military forces in the World War II battle of Guadalcanal. When an overwhelmed young officer came to him wanting to resign his command because eight men had died while carrying out his orders, he would again take his station after hearing the Admiral's response. He told this young officer about the hundreds of men who died under his command and how heavily it weighed upon him. The young officer said to Admiral Halsey something like, "But you are a great man." The Admiral replied, "There are no great men. There are great challenges, which ordinary men are forced by circumstances to confront." Likewise, the Lord never promised ease in our course. As a matter of fact, we are charged to "Bear hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Those of us to whom the Lord has given the charge, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" have the single responsibility to obey our Lord in this. That "longsuffering," bearing up patiently under adverse circumstances, is placed before "doctrine" is quite telling. It warns us that there will be oppositions, disappointments and grief in the discharge of our duty to "Preach the word." It does not take us long to discover that there are those who tire of the constant ministry of the Word because their love of the world outweighs the love of the truth. Sooner or later they will seek a less demanding ministry, if they do not forsake their profession of faith altogether. And then there are those who "will not endure sound doctrine." In such situations it is tempting to give in to discouragement, like the young officer under Admiral Halsey's command, and think that perhaps we should resign our 'commission' even though we do not intend to leave our Lord. After all, these fell under our leadership.

The church belongs to the Lord, not to us. We are but stewards given the high responsibility of managing that which is another's. We are soldiers in the greatest army but "The battle is the Lord's." It is ours to maintain our duty no matter the outcome. Our eyes are to be only on our Lord and not on the winds and waves that adversely arise against us. Our ship cannot sink as long as the Lord is onboard. And if we can say with Paul in 1 Timothy 1:12, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry," and we entered this post to obey and glorify our Lord above all, we are never to forget that blessed promise of our Lord, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." The Lord is not going to lose a single one the Father gave Him to redeem. The outcome of our ministry is the Lord's business. Our duty is simply to do what He has charged us to do, and to keep doing so against our own felt inabilities as well as oppositions from without. Do we not often have to remind ourselves that it is not our ability in which we are to trust but only our Lord's, who alone is able to make us able ministers of the New Testament? And is it not the grace of our

Lord to us to make us weak so that we will learn the only place of our true strength? Our duty, brethren, is the same as that of Paul's, who wrote, "As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts." (1 Thessalonians 2:4)

That word "charge" in 2 Timothy 4:1 is a strong one. It has the sense of giving solemn notice, of testifying, warning and confirming. And this was given to a pastor who was already in the ministry, and who was "nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine." It is not a matter of entering our course but of staying our course. The way we enter our course is certainly important! Those who would dare enter the ministry with a self-seeking motive will certainly not fulfill what Christ requires of His ministers. There must be the crucifixion of self-interest, the resistance against doing anything for self-aggrandizement, and the readiness to do and continue doing that with which we are charged. This calling is not simply that which is chosen as one's life vocation, in which career options are weighed to see which one most closely suits one's personal goals and aspirations. Nor is it simply to be an altruistic motive that moves one to enter the gospel ministry, with the thought of "I'm not interested in being rich, or famous, or building a comfortable life for myself, but rather of doing something important with my life." Rather, it is to singularly do the will of the One who sent you and to finish your course. Paul finished his course with joy, even though he had to say there was a time when "all men forsook me." But that's not all he said! He also added the most significant thing of all, "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known."

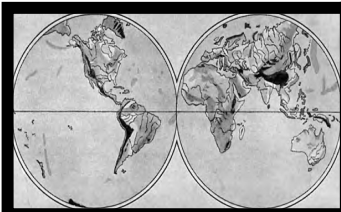
"There must be the crucifixion of self-interest, the resistance against doing anything for self-aggrandizement, and the readiness to do and continue doing that with which we are charged."

Christ's earthly ministry ended at the cross, forsaken even by those close to Him while leaving the whole issue to His Father. It was the Father's will and the Father's glory that was His driving impulsion. Thus He became "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." But the full outcome of His obedience, which appeared at the time the greatest defeat, is yet to be realized. And we can be assured, if by the grace of God we keep our eyes only on our Lord and toward the duty to which He has called us, that God will accomplish for eternity exactly what He has purposed.

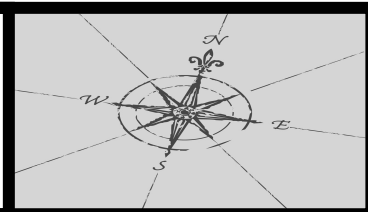
But let me remind you that these principles are not for pastors and preachers only. Although the leadership is placed in the vanguard of the battle, all the saints will find themselves engaged in it as well. So we must also heed that to which Paul charged Timothy, "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

May we ever be reminded that, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us."

Website: www.sovereigngraceinmechanicsville.org



World Missions



A Convocation of Prayer for Revival and Awakening By Larry W Dean

One might ask why this article is appearing in the Missions section of our *Sovereign Grace Messenger*. It is my sincere and abiding belief that the greatest mission project in the world right now is the project of seeking a visit of the Spirit of God upon the churches of Jesus Christ in the world, otherwise know as an Awakening.

Christianity in our day is in grave danger of becoming completely irrelevant in a rapidly changing world. I know of no serious-minded Christian who does not agree with that statement. In spite of the fact that Evangelical churches have grown to record numbers in attendance over the last 60 years, the impact of genuine Christianity upon the culture has grown less and less. We now live in one of the most corrupt cultures that the world has seen. I have often heard my father, the late Dale L. Dean, say, "if God does not judge this country for her sins, He should resurrect Sodom and Gomorrah and apologize." You and I understand the sentiment. The same sins that condemned them before God are not merely tolerated by this culture, they are glorified. And, we have added to our corruption the murder of countless millions of unborn infants, many of those abortions subsidized by public funds. The church, speaking of Evangelical Christianity in general, has, to this point, been powerless to stem the tide or even slow it down.

Some are hoping that Christian Conservatives can elect enough people to Congress to alter the downward spiral of our culture. But the scriptures remind us of the hopelessness of trusting in man.

*"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.
It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes."
(Ps 118:8-9)*

Others are hoping that God will raise up a charismatic leader for Christianity who will lead us out of this woe, that God will anoint someone who will sweep through this nation like a whirlwind and bring the churches back to Christ and our nation back to God. But we have had charismatic leaders over the last half century and we have some now. Some argue that their impact has been more destructive than constructive...and I agree.

So, what are we to do? What is the answer? Where can we turn? Have we forgotten the word of God?

Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron;

"Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High: Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help. Then they

cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder." (Ps 107:10-16)

One of the things that I learned as a young man was that there were many things necessary to survival in this world that I did not know how to do. I found it very useful to closely watch those men (and women) who knew how to do those things and try to imitate their efforts. "Monkey see, monkey do," I found to be extremely helpful.

A number of years ago, as I began to ponder the problems that I stated at the beginning of this article, I began to research the efforts of those who actually saw Awakenings in their days. There are many things to learn from those who shepherded the church through times of great Revival which not only changed the churches but also changed communities and even entire countries. I realized, as well, that the only thing that has ever reversed the moral degeneration of a culture and restored the basic principles of Christianity has been Awakening, as we commonly understand the word.

What did they do that ultimately resulted in the powerful visit of the Spirit of God upon them? Those who were allowed to minister in the Awakenings as well as those who have observed from the distance of time realized that nothing was more instrumental than Concerts of Prayer specifically petitioning God for those Awakenings.

This, then, left me with a decision to make. What would I do? After wrestling with the issue in my mind and before God for a couple of years, I determined to see if there were interested souls who would meet with me in a Convocation of Prayer to seek God's face for an Awakening in our time. I was delighted to have favorable responses from a number of brethren. I was even further delighted when a number committed to come to Bridgetown Baptist Church for three days of prayer.

Our first Convocation was in February of 2010. Nineteen men, most (but not all) of them pastors made the trip at their own expense and labored together in prayer before the throne of God. It was a learning experience, to be sure, but God was His Faithful Self and gave us blessings far beyond what we deserved. There was a portion of the meeting in which men shared burdens, difficulties and situations that were burdening them. Then, we all went before God to implore His help. We have several reports of special assistance from the Lord for those specific requests.

For more information or to attend the Convocation for Prayer for Revival 2012 on February 21-23 in Mississippi, please e-mail Larry Dean at larrywdean@aol.com.

But, could it happen again? Would people make the sacrifice a second time in 2011? After a late start to the planning (we won't do that again), a number committed to come and labor together again. The group was somewhat smaller than in 2010 but the spirit of prayer was just as intense and the felt burden seemingly even more profound. Again, the Lord was faithful to His Word and to His people. On the last day we seemed to enjoy the felt Presence of God more than we had in the other days. (As a personal impression, the last prayer session of the 2011 Convocation was the best of the two years combined.) Before we departed, the pastors gathered and prayed for one another in a separate meeting. We shared the burdens upon our souls with one another and lifted each other up to the Lord. It was a moving and encouraging time of prayer.

For those who may be curious, this is how our days went. The days began at noon with worship and an exhortation. We sang the Psalms to familiar (most of the time) tunes. The reason that we used the Psalms is that we desired to be on clear and safe ground in all things. There are many opinions concerning music and worship but we are pretty sure that the Holy Spirit is not grieved with the singing of the Psalms.

The afternoon was divided into 'sessions' of prayer, each with a set of 'prayer points' which suggested avenues of thought for prayer. Each 'session' had a theme, some issue relevant to the topic of Awakening and Revival. No one's conscience was bound to pray only on those issues, but we sought some ground for common agreement before God in prayer ("if two of you shall agree...") We asked that only men pray aloud, again because there is a variety of understandings of the role of women in such meetings. We did not want to grieve anyone's conscience or the Holy Spirit.

Around six o'clock we broke for dinner. The church served a light meal designed, hopefully, not to fill the building with smells of food because some fasted for part or all of the Convocation. Special effort was made not to call attention to those fasting but also not to create undue struggles for them. I am especially grateful to the ladies of our church who served. Another reason for having only a light meal was to enable them to be in the prayer sessions.

At seven we convened again for worship and the preaching of the Word of God.

Brother Richard Smith from Lawrence, KS spoke for us in 2010 and Brother Tom Henry of St. Louis, MO preached for the 2011 Convocation. Again, we sang only from the Psalms. We were joined in the evening services by those who work during the day and could not get the time off.

There are no words that I can find which would express my profound gratitude for all of those who participated in the days of prayer. Personally, I have been greatly helped by the meetings. The Lord has increased my burden for Awakening and Revival exponentially. It is my sincere prayer that He has done as much for others.

Going forward, we began plans for the 2012 Convocation while the 2011 meeting was still going on. I have asked Bro. David King from Milton, PA to be our speaker. A gracious lady in our church has totally revamped our church web site and made the Convocation 2012 an important part of the site.

Of course, we hope that Awakening and Revival will have broken upon us by then and that all pastors are so busy dealing with revived saints and new converts that no one will be able to come. Barring that, we are hoping that others who share the burden will make the time to come and be with us, February 21-23, 2012.



Larry Dean serves as pastor of Bridgetown Baptist Church of Nesbit, Mississippi. He is the Secretary of the Sovereign Grace Baptist Fellowship as well as Missions Editor for this publication.

Now back to where we started. If both church and state are in moral decline, if (as it seems) the Holy Spirit is being withheld from us, and if certain judgment is the only event that we see on the horizon, does it not become essential for the people of God to meet together in Concerts of Prayer both within our churches as well as together with saints from other congregations? Can one imagine another remedy? Is there anyone besides the Lord Himself Who can rescue us from a continuing slide down the current path?

For my whole life almost (my father was a Baptist preacher) I have been hearing God's people talk about our great need for Revival, the great Awakenings that have happened in the past and the urgency of our plight. "We need to pray for Revival," many have said and continue to say. But is it not time

now for the people of God to commit themselves to earnest, fervent, and continual prayer to God for that which is our ONLY REMEDY? Should we not make the matter one of urgent and passionate concern?

Here is something that every single child of God whether male or female, young or old, preacher, deacon or layman, can do to undertake to make a difference in our time. We are indeed helpless creatures but we serve a Mighty God Who has, time and again, heard the cry of His people and helped them. What could be a greater missionary endeavor than the labor to see the Spirit of God fall once again upon His people?

Another issue that must be considered is the future of world missions if the church in America continues down the path that she is presently following. Will the entire effort collapse? Or, will we export our corruptions to the world? Will the gospel become more corrupted for them than it already is? It is urgent that the message of Christ deteriorate no further. We must preserve the truth to the next generation.

It is absolutely true that God has promised to preserve His word and His work. But, does that mean that men are to be passive in the labor to preserve truth and seek Awakenings? I have concluded that the answer to that is 'no.'



Website: www.bridgetownbaptist.org

T..... J....., Papua, New Guinea

Dear Friends of our Cause,

We dig in our heels through another round of sickness here. Since Christmas, Alethea has suffered malaria and giardia and probable light dengue and then T.....came down with more severe dengue that put him flat on his back for a week (and that was a "light" case). He is still recovering. Dengue is called "breakbone fever" for a reason.

We now rejoice that, after two miscarriages within 2 1/2 years, we are pregnant again. We spent several tense weeks, however, waiting until an ultrasound could show a healthy baby and now we are relieved to be into the Second Trimester. We also endured several false negatives (stupid Indonesian pregnancy tests), not being able to see results clearly due to sub-standard equipment available here, and we went through a time of mental distress as we waited for clearer results, thinking we had also lost this pregnancy.

Some days nothing seems to come easy. One can do nothing but laugh, for instance, as Teresa stoops over me to start an IV because I am growing more and more dehydrated due to dengue, only for the electricity to go out just as she gets ready to poke. Perfect timing.

"Don't worry - God wouldn't afflict His servants."

Before we left the US in 2004 for our initial Survey Trip to Papua, we had several well-meaning supporters assure us, *"Don't you worry, you are serving the Lord - therefore, God will keep you safe."* Several people stated that the "Safest place was to be within the will of God." and that is true, spiritually - but several people, I believe, meant this also in a physical sense.

I would like to disabuse all Christians of this notion.

Serving God is an invitation to enter a fight. The world, the flesh, and the Devil oppose the Christian. Through much tribulation we must enter the Kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22).

One would think that God would open the doors wide for those who desire to spread His Good News; but He does not do so. In fact, He often seems to allow affliction in great degree and he crushes any sense of entitlement that sinful creatures are apt to feel, even believers. He seems pleased to allow Christians worldwide to sludge forward through the harshest of circumstances and to suffer much more than I have ever experienced. The health and wealth gospel seems more ridiculous to me every day.

He strips us of all comforts except Himself. If we have nothing else, we have Him - and that is enough.

This Year's Plans:

The joyous news of T.....'s pregnancy has altered our plans for this year. We still hope to spend nearly half our time interior in Danowage, but in August we will head to Bandung for a few months to deliver.

April: We host K.... S..... as he surveys the Mamberamo river with Yulianus and researches future ministry scenarios. I hope to teach some of the interior churches at this time as well.

Last half of April and May: We are interior in Danowage and will be assisting missionaries to our south, the D.....family, as we try to teach the D.... evangelists from the GIDI church in our area a systematic way of explaining the Scriptures chronologically. We are trying to improve the quality of the Papuan highland D... evangelists as, together, we try to saturate this broad region with a quality Gospel witness.

June: My parents will meet us in Bali for our first family vacation in quite a while. Following this, the World Team Asia Conference is being held June 8-12.

June and July: During these two months I am excited to host 3 high-quality interns from the US who are preparing for missions. We will stay in Danowage and trek to other tribal areas and check on the preaching stations.

Pray for D.....M....., A..... T..... and N... R..... They are gathering funds for this trip now.

August-November: We will go to Bandung, West Java and wait for Baby.

We plan to deliver at Santosa Hospital in central Bandung. During this time I will write some requested documents/booklets for the GIDI church, help out their local efforts there, and brush up on Indonesian as well as school N... in Indonesian.

End of November until the New Year's: We hope to be back interior in Danowage to celebrate the holidays in the tribe.

For those who do not know, one of the PNG evangelists who works closely with T....., J..... W....., was attacked and badly injured by a wild boar. He is the man who assisted T..... in N....'s baptism and has labored faithfully in Danowage. T..... had him medi-vac'd to the coast where he and T..... could take care of him. J..... has been through surgery and is on the mend. Of course, infections are always concerns there in PNG. T..... is asking for continued prayer for him.

As a reminder, this man had a very good job at the Freeport Mine, earning a good wage, but decided to leave it all to serve God and suffer poverty in the neediest area he could find. Both he and his wife P.....are very close to the Johnson family.

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for
security reasons**

P... and T.... S....., Indonesia

September seems to be approaching quickly! As our departure date is now in sight, we are as eager as ever to see it come. We are in the midst of the final stretches! We will never forget when the Lord started this whole process in missions, how we vowed to the Lord that we would do whatever it took to serve overseas. Whatever He wanted, we would do it.

This July will be 3 years of preparations. Looking back on these past few years, it was not us doing the work, but God. After all the Scriptures tell us we can do nothing on our own! It was and still is not us on our own strength, but the All-sufficient Lord who is working in and through us. Even during the long nights and thousands of miles, He has not only provided, but led every step of the way. How can we not serve this massive God, who has blessed us not only with the righteousness of Christ, but given us every spiritual gift in the heavens, and then equips us further for the task to take His message, the Gospel, to the most remote place on earth. This is a huge privilege that we are praying many more will embrace.

T.... and I are humbled that God would show such affection and mercy on us, call us to proclaim the Gospel, and teach others to teach others in a nation that does not know Him. To all of our supporters: Thank you for sending us and praying for us! We are thankful for all of our churches and individuals that are laboring with us. We are not content to merely serve on the field as missionaries with minimal contact or relationship. We are eager to fellowship and have a close relationship with all of our partners.

We seek not only to be blessed by you, but to bless you and labor alongside of you. In today's missionary movement, the local church is not seen as a vital lifeline in the task of many missionary efforts. This is not the case for us; we value and hold high the local church...you! Without you we could not do what we are doing! Thank you! We also want to thank you for your love and concern in regards to our van breaking down. T.... and I were laughing as we saw it towed away thinking that we only had a few months to go...we count it a blessing because all 3 times we broke down, God always took us out of danger and placed us with people that could help.

Pray with us for:

- The mobilization efforts that God is giving us, and the people that are desiring to serve long-term.
- PRAY FOR MORE WORKERS!
- Southeast Asia that God would grant repentance to these people groups. Many of these people groups are still without a Gospel witness.
- The Korowai-Batu people as the Gospel efforts are hitting these villages.
- The GIDI evangelists as they are laboring in these hard areas.
- J..... & P....., D... evangelists who are laboring in Danowage
- Our travels for the month of April/May, and the medical training Trish will take. Pray for these final months of getting ready to leave.
- Our support to be at 100% by September. We are currently at 70% monthly committed, but the Lord has provided financially so that we can leave this September and serve our first term. Our prayer is that we will not have to come back from our first term (4 yrs.) and raise support, but come back and fellowship with you and give you a report. However, we are trusting the Lord with whatever He wants.

Contact Info: Removed for security reasons

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Security reasons**

Ekklesia Theological Seminary, Pensacola Florida

We are currently putting our first two courses online and therefore, Lord willing, they should be ready for students in the very near future. These courses are: (1) New Testament Survey: The Life and Teachings of Christ; (2) Christian Preaching. We are accepting student applications (we now have over 90 potential students from North America alone, and are beginning to get applications from many other countries). The application can be downloaded at www.ekkleiaseminary.org. All students will be required to have a mentor. While we have had some men volunteer to mentor, we still need many more as there will no doubt be many overseas pastors desiring to take courses. There have been a number of churches that have included Ekklesia in their missions budget and for this we are very grateful to God! We are fervently praying that God will provide the remainder of the financial needs in the near future. We continue to be amazed at the incredible potential of this endeavor and we continue to ask the Lord to bless this work.

If anyone has questions concerning potential students, mentoring, or financial support, they can contact Jonny White at 850-438-6666 or Ekklesia@mountzion.org.

John Hunter - GUYANA REPORT APRIL 2011

Our latest trip to Guyana was a real blessing. The home of the Ronald and Baby Bhuanlall and Rokesh and Vadesha Toolsee, where we stayed, was our headquarters for the two weeks we were there. Kathy and I were not the only guests. A Muslim lady from New York City, a former neighbor of the Bhuanlall's, and an Anglican couple, Ronald's aunt and uncle from New Jersey, were also there. Almost every night I was invited to conduct devotions for all present and a few neighbors that came in. The Muslim lady, Bebe, began to read the Bible as a result of these devotions and has contacted us since our return. We are praying the Lord will change this lady's heart. Pray with us to that end.

We were able to visit many of the individuals and families known to us in the past. There were many highlights in these visits. Let me share just three.

The first is our visit with Sister Shirley and the #57 Village folks who used to meet under her and her deceased husband, Bro. Sonny's, house. We sang, studied God's Word and fellowshiped like old times. The teenagers and young people gave us their full attention.

Second, we visited for dinner a couple in a divided marriage, the Singhs. The wife is a Christian and the children have been raised in the Church but the husband is a wealthy Muslim business man. I asked if it would be all right for me to share devotions with them and was given permission. I turned to Psalm 22 and presented Christ crucified. The husband became so interested we stayed late to answer question after question! Pray the Holy Spirit will open this man's heart to Christ.

The third is our visit with the Chins. Winston Chin is the man I baptized my last week in Guyana 2 years ago. The Chins spend most of the time in the bush at their farm and came in just to see Kathy and me. They told us they continue to study the Bible together each day. How good God is. Mrs. Chin prayed for 40 years that her husband would come to Christ and now he is the spiritual leader in his home. Prayer is powerful because our God is sovereign.

The Lord also allowed us to see all four men who graduated from the Pastor's Training School I conducted. Three are presently pastoring and we heard all three preach.

All in all it was a great trip with many, many blessings. "To God be the glory, great things He has done"!

I received an interesting missions report recently. Considering the way that our current lawmakers run from anything that looks like conservative Christianity, I thought that this was a remarkable report from Mexico. North of the border there are many who have negative feelings concerning our neighbor to the south, but we should all rejoice when government officials are open to being provoked by the gospel and prayed for by godly men. May God send His help to Mexico as well as to the USA. —Ed.

From Andres Galaviz in Mexico:

"In December I had the privilege of preaching at a dinner given for area pastors by the municipal authorities. There were 20 cabinet members present along with 40 different pastors. I shared with them from Romans 12:21. From the comments I heard later, it seemed that it was a blessing to many of the cabinet members, especially those who are in charge of security. Many of them have come to the point of thinking that evil has triumphed over good. It is a blessing to share with them that in God there is hope, and He gives new strength to the tired and weak."

"We have also been invited to pray at least once a month with the municipal president, his cabinet, and mayors from the area. This privilege was extended to us along with other pastors. We each take one day during the month to share with those present and pray for their needs and for the needs of the area. We pray mainly that God will intervene and save souls, hear our cry and heal our land. We pray that our leaders will seek the Lord not only for physical security but for the salvation of their souls. We have been able to share what God has done and is doing in AguaCaliente. They have also been open to receive literature from us. May the Lord use these opportunities for His honor and glory. We desire to take advantage of this opportunity while the door is open for us. We must work while there is daylight, because the night will soon come when no man can work. Please pray with us that the Lord will visit and open their eyes to their need."

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The House That Bob Built

By Norma Faye Henry

(A tribute to Bob Henry by his sister. Tom Henry, current SGBF Chairman, is also one of Bob's brothers)

In paying tribute to Bob Henry, how does one describe
This beloved godly person so vital to our lives?
One of high moral character and kindness freely shown,
His passing left a lasting void. Our sorrow lingers on.

From the time of Bob's salvation; one truly born again,
Fruits of the Holy Spirit, were obvious in him.
He would build his house upon the solid rock of Christ
That spiritual one, made of good works, symbolic of the wise.

With his "Darling Mary Ellen", united heart and soul,
Training up their children in the way that they should go,
Counted with the faithful to assemble with the Saints.
Present for each service; seated in their usual place.

Educated in the scriptures, Bob had shown himself approved,
And with God given wisdom, well grounded in his views.
He understood the doctrines of God's Free and Sovereign Grace;
Served as deacon in his church a span of four decades.

Dedicated to that office to which he was ordained.
Performed its duties with great care to glorify God's name.
As a constant witness for the Lord in actions, words and deeds;
His testimony as a Christian planted many seeds.

To any job he undertook, Bob always gave his best
Hardworking and dependable and equal to all tasks.
His wide range of skills and talents and keen creative mind,
Were often used helping others solve problems of all kinds.

As his own family grew, so did the house Bob built expand
To welcome new in-laws and precious grandkids to the clan.
He touched so many lives at home, at work and on the job.
Those in need of spiritual guidance often came to Bob.

He was there with words of comfort for us in times of grief,
A strong shoulder we could cry on and find a sweet relief.
I'd listen to him lead in prayer, that gentle voice we loved.
With his reverent salutation to "Our Father and our God."

Bob was my brother in the flesh and in God's family.
Kindred spirit, dear companion and a real hero to me.
The closeness with our brothers and our sisters remained strong;
From the early bond of kinship instilled by Dad and Mom.
Outdoor work kept Bob in shape, younger than his years.
A very handsome man with a full head of gorgeous hair.
When he was diagnosed with cancer we were so distressed.
He began the grueling treatments with courage, faith and trust.

The illness he called "light affliction" placed fully in God's hands.
While we all prayed that health would be restored to him again.
Then tests revealed tumors had spread and his prognosis grim,
With heavy hearts we felt the dread and fear of losing him.

He endured the awful pain and suffering without complaint;
Maintained the same good humor and sweet spirit of a saint.
We watched his body weaken and his handsome face grow thin,
His spirit strengthened by the Word of God, gave him peace within.

A constant flow of visitors came to the house Bob built,
To see his face and hear his voice, and show the love they felt.
Mary Ellen and devoted children rarely left his side
Brothers came to offer help with any need they could provide.

I sat and held his hand, reliving happy times we'd had.
With our family all together back home with Mom and Dad.
I tried to keep a cheerful face while stifling my sobs,
And prayed for grace to say goodbye to precious brother Bob.

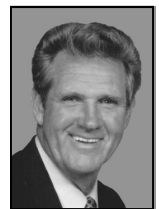
His wife and their eight children gathered round his bed that night.
They saw him through the valley of the shadow and take flight.
Departing from the earthly house that he had built for them,
To that glorious one in Heaven God had prepared for him.
Broken hearted loved ones found comfort in the word.
Knowing he was free from pain and present with the Lord.

The house Bob built by serving God is seen as strong and true.
In the vast outpouring of tributes and loving gratitude.
So many works he'd done for others, until then unknown,
Were revealed by folks indebted for the kindness he had shown.

Crowds of mourners filled the church that cool November day.
For Bob's service hundreds came from near and faraway.
They heard lovely hymns presented by those gifted in song
And a message unforgettable from his brother Tom.
Explaining "Why They Leave Us" from John chapter seventeen.
That Christ Jesus wants His own with Him, precious souls
redeemed.

Now that Bob is absent from us, things will never be the same,
We have this time of grieving for ourselves but not for him.
As we contemplate the wonders that lay in store for Bob,
In his Heavenly home forever, with "Our Father and our God."

In loving memory of
Robert Brice Henry



1938-2010

Apostasy: When Does a Church Cross the Line?

By Wayne Camp



the line and ceased to be New Testament churches. They prided themselves in unchurching churches and reorganizing them according to their own pattern. In fact, I just learned recently that there are those who believe that any church that does not hold to the doctrine known as “King James onlyism” has crossed the line and has ceased to be a true church. They do this in spite of the fact that this unchurches all churches prior to A.D. 1611. Considering the high importance and preciousness of the Lord’s churches to himself I have always been very concerned about such things. I have also been very careful about declaring that what once was apparently a true New Testament church to no longer be such.

SOME CHURCHES NAMED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ERRED GREATLY

It is evident from Scripture that a church can go seriously into error and still be a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider the church at Corinth. There were those among that church's membership who denied the resurrection of the dead and thereby denied the resurrection of Jesus Christ. *“Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?”* (1 Corinthians 15:12)

I once preached a series of sermons on the errors in the church at Corinth. It has been a long time since I preached that series but if I remember correctly there were sixteen or seventeen different errors which Paul rebuked in his first epistle to this church. Yet, it is very evident that he considered this church to be a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. *“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”* Paul did not hesitate to refer to it as *“the church of God which is at Corinth.”* (1 Corinthians 1:2)

Many in the churches of Galatia had been hoodwinked by false teachers on the matter of salvation being wholly of grace. *“O*

foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (Galatians 3:1-3)

These folks had heard the gospel, had, through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, believed the gospel, and had been saved by Jesus Christ. But some Judaizing teachers had misled them into believing, among other things, that their salvation was not quite complete unless they were circumcised. This is a very serious error into which they had been led. In fact, it was so serious, that when some of the same type of Judaizing teachers came to Antioch propagating the same error, Paul and Barnabas withstood them. The contention became so great that the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas and others to Judea to confer with the apostles and elders of the church at Jerusalem on the matter. *“And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.”* (Acts 15:1-2)

I have heard some say that if a church errs at all on the way of salvation it has gone into apostasy and ceases to be one of the Lord’s churches. Apparently, Paul did not agree with this contention. He wrote a letter to the churches of Galatia rebuking this error but there is not a hint that they were not true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. He warned them of those who had led them astray. *“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an*

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“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” (Revelation 2:4-5)

“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” (Revelation 3:15-16)

INTRODUCTION

How far into apostasy can a church go without crossing the line and ceasing to be one of the Lord’s churches? Let me emphasize that in this article I am not concerned with churches that have never been true churches. I will be writing only of those churches that started out as true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ but have erred from the faith once delivered to the saints.

I have known brethren who were “experts” on identifying churches that had crossed

angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:6-9)

These are very strong words against those who were propagating, among the churches of Galatia, a false doctrine concerning the way of salvation. And while he was amazed that these Christians in Galatia had been led astray by these false teachers, there is no indication that they had ceased to be true New Testament churches. So it is possible for a church (or churches) to err in following false teachers into such serious error without losing its credentials as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, this complicates the question before us in this article. *When does a church cross the line?*

“A church may go into serious error and not lose its status as a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, failure to repent of that error will put them over the line.”

SCRIPTURE DOES INDICATE THAT A CHURCH CAN ERR TO THE POINT THAT SHE CEASES TO BE A TRUE CHURCH OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

I do not believe that the warnings found in our texts are idle threats but are serious warnings. Our first text indicates that it is possible for a church to go so far from her first love that the candlestick will be removed. *“I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”*

An examination of the words of commendation that Jesus sent to this church indicates that they were orthodox in their theology and zealous in their works. *“I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.”* (Revelation 2:2-3) Is it possible that such a highly commended church could be in danger of crossing the line? Is it possible that a church that teaches the “five points” of sovereign grace and is zealous for church truth and practice could be in danger of crossing the line? Apparently that is possible!

The congregation at Ephesus had left their first love. Without arguing the point, I believe that the church's first love should be Jesus Christ and the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are churches who chew the biscuit of orthodoxy very thoroughly with one exception; they leave out Jesus Christ. Have you ever heard a sermon on the doctrine of election without hearing of Jesus Christ? I have! Have you ever heard a sermon on the doctrine of the church without hearing about Jesus Christ? I have! It would be mentioned that Jesus founded the first church on earth, but there was little of Christ and much of the church.

Have you heard sermons on the proper element in the Lord's Supper, who is to observe the supper, and other aspects of that ordinance with little attention to the fact that it is to be observed in memory of the broken body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ? If we are not careful we can get so wound up being correct in

orthodoxy and almost forget about Christ.

I believe that each of the five points is a part of the gospel. I do not subscribe to the idea that we should leave those alone and “just preach Jesus” as some say. On the other hand, when we preach total depravity we should not neglect to preach that the remedy for human depravity is found in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should not neglect to emphasize that the fall of the first Adam necessitated the death of the second Adam, Jesus Christ. It would also be good to emphasize that when Christ came into the world He came in the likeness of sinful flesh. It would be well to declare that God made Jesus to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

When we teach and preach unconditional election Christ should be central in that doctrine. We should not get so caught up in proving that it is unconditional and sovereign that we forget to declare that we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. When we preach the limited atonement we should not get so involved in teaching that it is limited that we forget to lay out clearly who made that atonement. In short, the declaration of fundamental doctrines should never leave out Jesus Christ. He should be our first love.

To the church at Ephesus Jesus said, *“I have somewhat against you because you have left your first love.”* He then called on that church to repent of this error and warned them that failure to repent would bring about the removal of the candlestick.

A church may go into serious error and not lose its status as a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, failure to repent of that error will put them over the line. There can be no error worse than impenitence on the part of a New Testament church. Impenitence would have put the church in Ephesus over the line.

In our second text Jesus warns the church of Laodicea that unless they repented he would spew them out of his mouth. *“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”*

If a church is not careful, prosperity can be its worst enemy. A church that can be in the world but not have the world in the

Excerpt from "The Palace's Framework and Remarkable History"

In his charge to young Pastor Timothy, the apostle Paul spoke of the "house of God, which is the church of the living God" as the "pillar and ground of the truth" (**1 Timothy 3:15**). God has entrusted the rare and excellent treasure of His Word to His church, the Palace Beautiful. Thus His eternal, unchangeable Word forms both the foundation upon which she is built and the pillars that support and uphold her. But since there are many enemies who seek to undermine, pervert and destroy her framework, the church must faithfully keep this trust by teaching the Scriptures without compromise, and "earnestly" contending "for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (**Jude 3**). To this end, the Palace Beautiful places the highest emphasis upon sound doctrine and vital, life-altering truth (**Luke 1:1-4**). Therefore, the Word of God is the sole authority of all that is believed and proclaimed there.

"What is truth?" asked Pontius Pilate, even as he sinned against the light of his own conscience (**John 18:38-19:6**). Men still grapple with this question today, and each one has his own opinion as to the definition of truth. Many claim to believe the Word of God, but few have a scriptural conception of what truth really is.

The truth that is believed and faithfully proclaimed in the Palace Beautiful centers in a person, the Lord Jesus Christ (**John 5:39-40**). The only one who could rightly say, "I am the Truth"! Therefore, while Christian was in the study, he received more particular instruction about his Lord: His unique character as the Son of God and Son of man, His essential deity, eternal generation, and divine character and attributes. Moreover, after being well-grounded concerning the person of Christ, Christian was instructed more perfectly concerning the works of the Lord Jesus, His willingness to forgive even those who had sinned grievously against Him, and the blessed estate that He has secured for His people. This comprehensive instruction served to both reinforce and expand upon what he had previously learned.

Then Christian was initiated into the history of the Palace Beautiful, most notably things concerning family members in the past who had faithfully served their Lord and followed Him, some even to a martyr's death. These were not super-heroes, as might seem the case. They were ordinary men and women who served an incomparable Lord. One who is ever Faithful and True (**Revelation 19:11**)! One who kept His promise never to leave or forsake them (**Hebrews 13:5-6**)! One in whom all power and authority in heaven and earth are vested (**Matthew 28:18-20**)!

Palace history certifies that many of these ordinary believers performed extraordinary feats, but not in their own strength. Through personal weakness they prevailed and were made strong so that, by faith, they could perform mighty deeds of valor in the face of incredible opposition. How could they endure such adversity? By considering "him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself" (**Hebrews 12:3**)! By faith they saw beyond this life to a better one to come. Like Abraham of old, they "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (**Hebrews 11:10**). Therefore, they have their place among the ranks of those who "through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." (**Hebrews 11:33-34**)

Ω

From "Meditations in Pilgrim's Progress"
By Carolyn Staley

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church is especially blessed. This is not the case with Laodicea. The world was in the church. Materialism was an obsession with them. With that materialism came arrogance and self-sufficiency. "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." (Revelation 3:17) Their wealth and self-sufficiency blinded them to their miserable spiritual condition. They had put Jesus on the outside. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20)

One might be tempted to say that a church that has no room for Christ has crossed the line and ceased to be a true New Testament church. But Jesus still loved this church. Notice that Lord still called on this church to repent, which indicates He had not yet spewed it out of His mouth. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." (Revelation 3:19) They had not crossed the line completely but were in danger of doing so. Their only hope was to repent of their worldliness and self-sufficiency and return to their fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Just as God-wrought repentance was the deliverance for the church at Ephesus and the church at Laodicea, it was also the deliverance for the church at Corinth. "For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing." (2 Corinthians 7:8-9)

CONCLUSION

Finally, I may not have been as conclusive and definite about how a church can cross the line and cease to be a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ as some would be. The Lord is more concerned with calling churches that err to repentance than He is with casting them out as true churches. True churches are lights in this sin-darkened world. Jesus is more concerned with trimming their wicks than He is with spewing them out of His mouth. We need to be more like Christ in dealing with erring churches.

WOMEN MINISTERING TO WOMEN

By Sandra Ruble

When thinking about how Christian ladies can minister in the church, let's first look at what it DOES NOT mean? It does not mean that a woman can take a role of leadership in the church where she is exercising authority over a man. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." 1 Timothy 2:11-14, "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." One of the qualifications of the bishop/elder/pastor found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 is a bishop must be "the husband of one wife." Likewise 1 Timothy 3:8-13, in giving the qualifications of a man who desires to be a deacon says, "Let deacons be the husbands of one wife." My point here is that a woman cannot be the husband of one wife. Therefore, this point alone would disqualify her from these offices of the church, notwithstanding the instruction given by Paul in 1 Corinthians. Some might question why I am even raising this point. In our fellowship I would say this isn't a problem, yet when we look around at area churches we see many who have erred on this point. Perhaps the rationale is that no man will stand up and take leadership so the women have to do so. Maybe the woman who has taken on the role of pastor in the church is educated and eloquent with a heart for service. Even if you have a higher IQ than some of men in the church, went to Bible school and have a good knowledge of the Scriptures, or even have the gift of teaching, be aware of your place in the church. There are legitimate avenues of ministry for the women in the church. Do not covet those offices that God has ordained only for the men in the church.

Well, then does that mean that when a woman enters the assembly of believers, she is to immediately become mute? Can a woman not teach at all? We know it can't

mean that, for Titus 2:3-5 specifically tells women to teach and what to teach. "The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed." Now that gets us back to our original topic. Not just how Christian ladies can minister in the church, which can be varied from ministering in music, teaching children, organizing special functions, etc. according to their talents and abilities, but "how the women in the church minister to one another."

This portion of Scripture gives great importance and detailed instruction on how the ladies can minister to one another in the church. First, we see that a duty is put on the older women that their lives should exemplify a pattern of holiness in their dress, speech, and walk. Their lives should be such that they can say as Paul did, "Follow me as I follow Christ." (1 Cor. 11:1) With age should come maturity, sobriety, wisdom in the things of God and the things of this life. We will have life experiences to share with the young ladies in our church and should have knowledge of God's Word to encourage them on the way. Let's look specifically at the behavior of these older women. 1. "The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness." Older women should be reverent in the way they live. They are to live a life that is consistent with their claim to be followers of God. 2. "Not false accusers." They are not to be false accusers or slanderers. Slander is giving false or malicious statements or causing injury to someone's character, i.e. gossiping. A godly woman will set a guard over her tongue and in her tongue will be the "law of kindness." (Proverbs 31:26) 3. "Not given to much wine." The godly aged woman will practice temperance in all things, not letting anything have inordinate control over her life. Whether it be in matters of food and drink, spending money or pursuit of pleasures, she will demonstrate the ability to say "No" when necessary for the

sake of Christ and her testimony. 4. And finally the older women are to be "teachers of good things." With all that the world offers to allure our young families, grave responsibility is placed on us to teach and encourage our young wives and mothers.

What then are the good things we are instructed to teach? (vs. 4) "That they may teach the young women to," 1. "Be sober." The young ladies should be taught to lay aside the giddiness of youth. Recognize the responsibility you have in taking care of your home and family. Think seriously on the things of God. Grow in maturity. Am I saying never laugh or smile? Of course not! A child of God should be genuinely joyful, but as women of God we should be careful to maintain a deportment of godliness in the things we say and do. 2. "To love their husbands, to love their children." Well, now that's an easy one isn't it? Of course I love my husband and children. But do you love them with a godly love, a love that desires to see their good? A selfish love can lead to a woman despising her husband if he doesn't meet the criteria that she has imagined as necessary for happiness. True love for him will see you encouraging him in godliness, building him up to be the man of God, father and husband he is called to be. The young wife should be encouraged to look for the good qualities in her husband and appreciate them. Real love is more often expressed in what you do than what you feel. Love is active. Romans 5:8, "God demonstrated His love toward us".... He didn't just see our plight and feel sorry for us. He didn't just love us and wish us well, but He sent His only Son to die for us. We must tell young women that the most powerful, true love for your children will lead you to teach them and guide them even in discipline when necessary. Proverbs 13:24, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." Love for your children doesn't just include making sure they have three meals a day and clean clothes on their backs. It also means teaching them about their sin and need for a Savior, showing them by your life that God is ALL important to you while praying that God would bring salvation to your household.

continued next page

3. *"To be discreet, chaste."* A young Christian lady's demeanor should be pure. It is common to see a young woman in society flaunting her body, using suggestive language and acting inappropriately toward men. But this is not to be so in the Christian lady's life! She should endeavor to walk in a manner pleasing to her God and Savior at all times. Her virtue should be obvious. 4. *"Keepers at home."* The older women should demonstrate to the younger women by word and deed that the home is a lovely and worthy place to be. I remember being asked one time when my children were little what my occupation was. I answered, "homemaker." The questioner then said, "So you JUST stay home." I answered, "I don't JUST stay home. I take care of my home and teach my children. I give them a clean, healthy environment in which to live. I strive to give my husband a peaceful haven to come home to after a hard day's work." Taking care of the home and raising the children is a fulltime job. The Proverbs 31 woman presents a great example of a woman who blessed her husband and her family through her industry in so much that they rose up and called her blessed. The older women of the church can offer much instruction on the management of the home and raising children unto the Lord. 5. *"Good."* Teach the young lady to not only be good but to do good. Again, if we think of the Proverbs 31 woman, she reached out beyond her home to others in her community. Our tendency at times might be to only see what is within our own four walls, but we must open our eyes to the needs of others. *"To do good and to communicate forget not."* (Hebrews 13:16) *"Communicate"* in our verse here means to give to the necessities of others. In I Timothy 2:9, 10 Paul tells Timothy to teach, *"I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God."* (Emphasis mine) 6. *"Obedient to their own husbands."* The older women are to teach the younger women what obedience looks like and how to practice it. Their own marriages should show to the young women that "obedience," "submission," and "reverence" aren't words to be feared but to be embraced by the godly wife who desires her marriage to exemplify Christ and His relationship to His bride, the Church. She will not obey her husband out of slavish fear but out of respect and love.

In his instructions to Titus, Paul gives the greatest motivator for the older women to teach the young women and for the young women to listen and follow these instructions – *"That the word of God be not blasphemed."* I went to the dictionary to find the meaning of "blaspheme." It means to show contempt or disrespect. So when we as women of God ARE NOT sober, loving our husbands and children, pure, keeping our homes, good and obedient to our husbands, we are showing contempt for God and His Word. He is the One who has established the pattern of the family and home. He is the One who has ordained how we should live our lives and only as we follow Him do we fulfill His perfect will in our lives. The older women then should take seriously their responsibility to maintain a godly example for the younger women in the church to follow, and strive to build a relationship with the young wives and mothers in the church so that they would feel free to come to them for counsel.

"So, teaching is a big part of the women's ministry to each other in the church, but there are other ways we can minister to one another."

However, the responsibility not only lies on the older women to be teachers. The onus then lies on the younger women to be students. They must not be too haughty or proud to ask for advice or seek instruction. They should see this as God's way of building His church. Then they in turn will have the ability to instruct their children and encourage one another in the way. We might cite an example of an older woman being a blessing to a younger woman in Luke 1:39-45 where we read that after learning that she was with child, Mary goes to visit her older cousin Elizabeth. Rather than exhibiting jealousy that Mary was given the honor of bearing the Messiah, Elizabeth encouraged and built up Mary. What are some areas where the older women might teach a younger woman? Finances/budgeting; godly parenting/disciplining; domestic skills, i.e. cooking, sewing, decorating on a budget, gardening; time management; how to study God's Word; ways to minister to others.

So, teaching is a big part of the women's ministry to each other in the church, but there are other ways we can minister to one another. After I was asked to write this article, I asked our church ladies, "What do you think of when I say 'women ministering to women'?" The consensus was that the greatest way we serve one another is through prayer. I am confident that when I ask our church ladies to pray about something, they will do it and then follow up later to find out how God has answered our prayers. It is a great privilege to be afforded the opportunity of entering into someone else's trial through prayer. What a blessing it is then to see how God answered the prayer. When all have been praying, then all reap the blessing of increased faith. I tend to want "hands on" ministry. When I ask someone what I can do for them and they answer, "Pray for me," I often want to say, "Okay, but I want to DO something." The greatest gift we can give a hurting saint is to lift them up before the throne of He who is their only source of help and strength. We know that the *"effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man (Elijah—one man singular) availeth much."* (James 5:16) And when we pray for one another, we imitate the intercessory ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ who prayed for His people in John 17.

Another avenue of service that our ladies mentioned was listening. Again, this one is much harder to do than getting in and getting your hands dirty. You actually have to shut your mouth and open your ears. Sometimes a sister might need to talk to someone about a problem that she has. She might need encouragement. I will caution here that when we are listening we do need to be careful about **just** commiserating. There will be times when our sister will need to be reminded that she is not thinking rightly. She might need to be encouraged to follow the principles laid out in God's Word. It behooves us then to have a working knowledge of God's Word that we can give comfort, encouragement, and/or instruction always with a spirit of humility remembering we only stand by the grace of God.

There are more tangible ways we can serve such as taking meals when there has been illness or death in the family. Our ladies take meals to new mothers to give them a few days of recuperation time. We might also offer light housekeeping assistance to our sister when she is going through a time of trial. Also, I think the nursery is a wonderful ministry offered to the young



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She is very active in practical ministry to the ladies in the church and in music.

mothers of the church. In my years as a pastor's wife I have had young mothers say to me that it seems fruitless for them to come to the services because they have to spend too much time outside the sanctuary doors dealing with young children. I do remember those days myself but I always encourage the young mother to come to church anyway. She needs the fellowship of the saints even if she has to sit in the nursery feeding her baby and take the tape home to listen to later. Hearing from God by the avenue of the preaching of His Word is the main reason we gather together as a church body; therefore, we should want to see that the Word of God goes out unhindered. This often will mean removing a child from the services before he/she makes a disturbance. Certainly the early training of a child to sit in the services with his parents is the ideal goal, but having a nursery in place for visitors and for mothers with very young children is a great way to serve the body of Christ. Young mothers sharing children's hand-me-downs can also be a great blessing to other young families. Ministry involves sharing our worldly goods as well as our time.

We could also mention visiting or calling the widows in the church to encourage them that they are not alone or forgotten. Perhaps a young family could "adopt a Grandmother" or one of the older women in the church could "adopt a family" to be a mentor to a young wife and mother. Offer to babysit for the young parents occasionally so they can go out for an evening together. In the early years of our

marriage we lived over 900 miles away from our family but there was a widow in our church who showed kindness to us. She even asked the children to call her Grandma since their grandmas were so far away. To this day our children still remember this dear saint.

Showing hospitality is another way the ladies can minister to one another. Our ladies take turns hosting the Women's monthly fellowship but one on one time is good too that you might be able to develop the family bond. What a delightful way to spend an afternoon with a cup of tea and a sister in Christ discussing the things of the Lord!

Perhaps there is a reader saying, "Our church ladies do way more than you have mentioned in your article." Be thankful for the ministry opportunities available in your church and get involved in them. Or maybe you are on the other end of the spectrum saying, "My church doesn't do any of this. No one ministers to me." My first comment to that would be that the point of this article is not to make comparisons. Secondly, I would admonish you not to be looking to see how the ladies are ministering to you but, instead, how are you ministering to the other ladies in the church? Don't look to be ministered to but look to serve. *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...."* (Philippians 2:5) Jesus came to minister. Paul tells us that we all have a function in the body of Christ. Some body parts are more visible, some more

honorable, but all are needed for the proper function of the body. (I Corinthians 12:12-26) Not one of God's children is indispensable in His kingdom. He has saved us for the purpose of glorifying Him (Ephesians 1:4-6) and we will do that by loving and obeying Him. The world will know that we are His by our love for one another. (John 13:35) Having moved away from family when we got married, our church family has always been our family. It has always been a blessing to me to know that in Christ I have a hundredfold sisters and mothers. (Matthew 25:29) Look for ways to serve your sisters in Christ. Don't become solely focused on your family and your needs but look to the needs of others. Keep your eyes and ears open with a ready hand to help.

As I finish writing I ask, "Lord, why was I asked to write this article?" I feel so inadequate for the job. In my own life some of my learning has come from seeing how NOT to behave through negative examples. From the very beginning I have felt in writing this article God was giving me the opportunity to evaluate my ministry to the ladies in our church. Am I an example of the older lady to the young ladies in the church as I should be? Am I focusing solely on my own needs and wants or do I look for ways to bless others? Am I being the best little toe I can be? If we look for ways to serve God in the body of Christ, we will find them. Oh, may God give us all hearts that love one another, seeking to do good, encouraging one another to follow after Christ.



The Quilt Project began under the leadership of T..... J..... to help Indonesian women who lost the support of their Muslim families when they confessed faith in Christ. They make beautiful, high quality quilts (like the one shown here) that would normally sell at much higher prices in the U.S. Please consider supporting these converts by purchasing one of their fine hand-crafted pieces.

Information on quilt designs, sizes and pricing may be obtained by contacting Jeannie Henry in St. Louis, Missouri at (636) 677-6241 or emailing her at bbcinstl@aol.com. A new shipment was received in December, so please have a look at what is currently available!

This is a non-solicited and non-compensated announcement.

Sovereign Grace Baptist Fellowship



Annual Meeting of the Sovereign Grace Baptist Fellowship Tuesday, September 13, 2011

Ten years ago the Sovereign Grace Baptist Fellowship met on September 11, 2001 for the first time at Bible Baptist Church in St. Louis, MO. On this Tenth Anniversary of the forming of the fellowship, our annual meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 13th at Sovereign Grace Baptist Church in Anniston, AL.

Speakers for this year's conference include Terry Worthan, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Winston, GA, and Ron Staley, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Mechanicsville, VA.

Also joining us as this year's guest speaker is Don Currin, a full-time itinerant evangelist currently residing in Muscle Shoals, AL. Don is also serving as Coordinator for Eastern Europe with HeartCry Missionary Society in Christianburg, VA. Don's wife, Cindy, will also be joining him and will have a special presentation for the ladies during our afternoon business meeting.

We are also blessed to have Brother Currin from Sunday, September 11th to Wednesday, September 14th as our "Flowing Faith Conference" speaker, running coincident with the annual meeting. You may want to come early and stay a little longer to take advantage of the blessing from this special event. More on Don Currin's ministry may be found at www.doncurrinministries.org.

There are several hotels and motels in nearby Oxford, and also some reasonably priced motels in Anniston. We hope to have a reasonably fixed rate set at one, possibly two Inns; however, at this writing that information has not yet been finalized. If you would like to sign up for the newsletter found on my website, www.justificationbygrace.com, or the congregation's website, www.sovereigngraceanniston.com, we will get that information out to you as soon as it is made available.

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If you know of sound, Sovereign Grace missionaries who would like to be included in our mission reports, please have them email details of their ministries to: larrywdean@aol.com.

Check out the SGBF website: www.sovereigngracebaptistfellowship.org

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